

I am grateful to Jason for preaching at the service last Sunday, and for the Deacons for organising and taking the service. During his message, Jason told us, his father a military man himself, told him never to stand still, rather to keep moving so that he does not become a target. Well, my father used to tell me exactly the opposite: stop moving and be still, at least for a moment!

This morning, we want the Psalms to teach us about "*rest*"; what does it mean, to **rest in God's care**?

We live in a world where activity is a goal to be rewarded. Words like, output, time management, productivity, efficiency, govern the way we live. We feel guilty, even made to feel guilty if we are not doing something. I have often been greeted many an evening with the words, *So, what did you **DO** today?* At the peril of losing life and limb, I have not tired the response, *Nothing really. Just rested!*

The word **rest** means different things to people. When a teenager appears to be *resting*, we label them as lazy. When a pregnant mother sits down for a few minutes, we say she must have *much needed rest*. Labour unions fight for *more rest **and** more pay*, for overworked and underpaid workers. The pastor of a megachurch recently said, *"I've been running on empty for some time now, ... I'm broken and I just need some rest"*, a feeling with which many of us might empathise!

We might agree **rest** is God's blessing. How often have we heard someone say, *There is no rest for the wicked*, which also means, there is rest for blessed!

The saying is taken from the writing of the prophet Isaiah, *"But people who still reject me are like the restless sea, which is never still, but continually churns up mud and dirt. There is no **peace** for the wicked, says my God."*<sup>1</sup> God's rest and God's peace go hand-in-hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 57:20-21

100 years after the prophet Isaiah, Jeremiah echoes the same thought, *"From the least to the greatest, their lives are ruled by greed. From prophets to priests, they are all frauds. They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wound. They give assurances of peace, when there is no peace."*<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is very clear, the absence of God, is the absence of peace; the presence of God is the presence of peace. So, is it any wonder, in a world increasingly at war, everyone cries for peace, but the One who offers peace, is rejected?

Let's start at the very beginning. *"In the beginning, God created ..."*, and the pinnacle of his creation is the man and the woman. Having triumphed over chaos and disorder, on the seventh day God rested. Having *created* the man and the woman, God passes on and entrusts them with the act of creation, until the human population *subdues* the earth.

God rested and the world was at peace, until the man and the woman fell for the lie, *Did God really say...* and disobeyed the trust given to them. They were trusted to look after and maintain the purity of God's creation on the very earth on which God's garden was created, but the consequence of their disobedience turned that gift of peaceful existence into laborious work, in childbearing for the woman, and the man being the farmer-harvester, the provider for his family.

In Genesis, **Rest** is God's blessing; it was not commanded, but when God led the people He chose, to live in a land blessed by Him, to show the world the perfectness of God's laws and His order of government, **rest** is commanded: *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. On it you shall not do any work, nor shall anyone related to you, employed by you, or a visitor to you.*<sup>3</sup> The Sabbath commandment is the longest and most detailed of all the commandments. The Sabbath defines God's people, and observing it

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 6:13-14

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:8-11

is God's command. We are bound by it and we are obliged to obey it, **ONLY** to honour God, and Him alone.

The idea of **rest** is an integral part God's story. God promised the people He had chosen, they would have **rest** in the land into which He would lead them, **IF** they lived in obedience to His laws. When they did, there was peace in the land; when they did not live in obedience to God's laws, there was no peace in the land.

When God comes to us in the person of His Son, Jesus, who knows very well, the state in which we live, says to us, *Come to me all you who are exhausted from working hard, all you who carry heavy burdens, and **I WILL give you rest.***<sup>4</sup>

Those who knew their Scriptures well, when they heard Jesus, understood it was the ancient promise of God coming true when God said to Moses, *My presence will go with you, and **I will give you rest***<sup>5</sup>

It is rightly referred to as the "Sabbath rest", because on that day, we should participate in, and enjoy, and get a taste of the **rest** God has promised.

The Holy Spirit gave the Apostle John a view of God's eternal rest, "*Blessed indeed...(are they who live through suffering, keeping the commandments of God and holding onto their faith in Jesus) that they may **rest** from their labours for their deeds follow them.*"

It is a rest that is experienced in this life and after death, rest for eternity.

Leo Tolstoy went through a profound spiritual crisis, shortly after he turned fifty in 1878, a decade after *War and Peace* and two years after *Anna Karenina*.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 11:28

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 33:14

On the brink of suicide, Tolstoy turned one last time to the world's great religious and philosophical traditions, to find an answer to the meaning of life. This was a deep soul wrenching experience for him, working through philosophers, science and religious traditions.

After several years of turmoil in his soul, Tolstoy says, *I was inevitably brought to acknowledge ... (it is) faith which makes it possible to live. ... I could not but admit that (faith) alone gives mankind a reply to the questions of life, and that consequently it makes life possible.*

Tolstoy goes on to say, *"I understood that faith is not merely "the evidence of things not seen", (quoting Hebrews 11)... but faith is a knowledge of the meaning of human life in consequence of which man does not destroy himself but lives. Faith is the strength of life.*<sup>6</sup> Tolstoy experienced God's peace here and now, but the door to eternal rest is only through Jesus Christ, which is not something Tolstoy acknowledged.

David, the author of many Psalms, acknowledges the importance of an intimate relationship with God, which results in experiencing His peace here and now, and being led by Christ to God, into His eternal rest, eternally freed from any labour!

*I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken ... You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fulness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*<sup>7</sup> Whom does David refer to, at God's right hand? The Saviour of the world, Jesus the Christ.

You might be searching for truth; you might be struggling with emotions which surprise you; you might be at a cross-roads in life; you might be holding back on surrendering your **TOTAL** life to God in **TOTAL** obedience to His laws and His will; you might be making every effort to put aside

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/06/03/tolstoy-confession/>

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 16: 8 and 11

thoughts and emotions which you know are not honouring to God; perhaps you are undecided whether God is all He is made out to be, from what you have heard from others. Whatever your struggle, Jesus, speaking on God's behalf says to us, *"Come to me, all you who work hard, you who worry about things you cannot change, you who are weighed down by emotions which have trapped you and need to be released, you who are struggling with questions about the meaning of life ... whatever your struggle, come to me, and **I WILL give you rest**. The burden you are carrying is heavy; you are struggling under the weight of a yoke on your neck. Come to me, learn from me because I am gentle and humble in heart, **and you will find rest for your souls**. Take my yoke which is easy and my burden is light."*<sup>8</sup>

Could it be, this invitation into a relationship with Jesus is what your soul deeply craves for? Could it be, you realise God's first priority is a relationship with Him, through which your soul is refreshed? Could it just be true, Jesus was not joking when he said His yoke is easy and His burden is light? Could it be possible to find the kind of rest for your soul that leads you to say, genuinely, *I surrender all to Jesus, and let Him lead me?*

Jesus invites you to experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can ever understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest, as you learn to trust in the promise of the Christ.

It is short journey, of leaving your doubts and fears, and releasing yourself into the care of the One who is gentle and humble in Spirit, and He will give you peace, and at the right time, lead you to your well-deserved, eternal rest.

**AMEN**

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 11: 28-30